

NEWTON YOUTH COMMISSION Meeting

January 6, 2010 MINUTES

Location: Newton City Hall Cafeteria

Present: Joe De Vito (Chair), Donna Gordon, Robert Staulo; Marianne Cook, Chris Fortunato, Matt Green, Ofc. Jeff Mace, Ellen Manning, Stephanie Pelkowsky, Stephan Ross, Terance Sack, Kirsten Tuohy
Students: None present

Regrets: Tony Bibbo, Richard Dyer, Peter Harrington, John Staulo,
Students: Zachary Eagle, Gerry Lueng, Tamara Matama, Kyle Olson, Zoe Pepper-Cunningham, Adam Sangiolo, Ariana Tabatabaie

Staff: Beverly Droz, Director, Human and Volunteer Services

Guests: Mark Hall (Newton Partnership) and Rich Catrambone (NSHS)

The meeting was opened at 7:10 PM and chaired by Joe De Vito.

Introductions were made and Joe gave a brief overview of how the Youth Commission was involved with consideration of sponsoring the Restorative Justice Program.

GUEST PRESENTATIONS

We welcomed Rich Catrambone, the NSHS counselor who initiated the program at NSHS three years ago.

Rich spoke about restorative justice as a community-based program that works cooperatively with the Police. There are two tracks: 1) a criminal basis where students go through the court system and 2) the restorative practice, which is a school-based program (like NSHS). He hopes that the Youth Commission can sponsor a small pilot program to see if we can introduce it to the larger community. He credited Judge Klein for introducing it. The goal includes having four to six cases over the next six months and to train 20 community volunteers.

Three basic points were reviewed:

1. Kids have to take ownership of the offense.
2. Kids have to work to make amends with the victim.
3. Kids have to work to accomplish community service and the goals of their circle.

We welcomed Mark Hall, who works for The Newton Partnership approximately two days a week on restorative justice. He credited Rich for bringing restorative justice to The Newton Partnership back when the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant was organizing. Mark has been discussing it with NNHS but reported that they don't feel that they have the time for the circles. He thinks they will undertake it but it will be handled differently.

Rich noted that the RJ circles offer the opportunity of choice to students. Do they want to participate or do they want to be expelled and punished for their misdeed. So far, it's been a viable program and NSHS but we need to prove it can be a viable program on a little larger scale. Rich and others can provide the training and resources. He's heard that open circles are starting at the grade school level.

Members discussed that this could be a larger partnership with the Youth Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the Police, the District Attorney's Office and residents at large that would be interested. We need a vehicle to bring people together and to train volunteers.

Members covered questions as to where and how volunteers are recruited, and how do we bring it to the community. We would need to set up a pilot program and outreach to the constituency that we are trying to engage. We acknowledged that it begins with kids who have committed non-violent offenses. Stephanie stated that the more it is in the school, the more the parents know about it and that would encourage their participation.

As Mark mentioned, NNHS is looking at it but they already have a strong mediation program. Restorative justice is a very time consuming program; it requires a minimum of five hours per circle with many tasks and meetings.

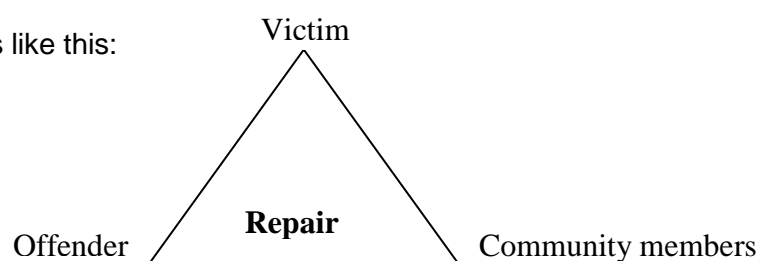
Rich believes it will be easier to perform in the community than in the schools where teachers are overload. The goal is for this to become a dominant approach in juvenile justice, and reduce caseloads in the criminal justice system.

Mark stated that he works 13 hours a week with The Newton Partnership. His role is to help Rich but especially advocate for NNHS to get restorative justice going. He has had meetings with the Police, the District Attorney, Probation Officer Deb D'Arcy, Judge Klein and Judge King. It hasn't been introduced to the middle schools but they are planting the seeds to do so.

- o Rich invited all to a dialogue night to see first hand what it's all about. Rich also noted that he has all kinds of resources, including books, CDs, etc. and he's willing to share them.
- o Ellen expressed interest in learning restorative justice and involving the Teen Center.
- o Marianne suggested that if the Youth Commission sponsors a public forum, it will be presented as a pilot program so there is not an expectation that it will be ongoing.
- o Chris said that the Youth Commission could sponsor a program and it be administered by The Newton Partnership. We would state that it is mission and goal driven.
- o Jeff inquired if they have approached the PTO and School Committee. Rich said that the NSHS PTO is involved. Mark said he will find out about the NNHS PTO. Rich has approached some School Committee members, some Aldermen and Mayor Setti Warren.

A long discussion followed on how it would work. Who would oversee the volunteers? Rich said he would. The open forum night event was again described. It would be important to have sample cases as part of the literature so that volunteers understand what they would be doing. Gatekeepers are the Police Department who determine whose participation is appropriate. Rich indicated that a minimum of 15 volunteers are needed with which to start. One is a facilitator or keeper, the "group leader" who moderates the circle and meets with others involved, such as the Police, etc.) The mentor person works with the offender from six weeks to three months depending on the contract. The mentor is a support and a help to the offender. Community witnesses who react, and discuss what is appropriate for the contract for the repair of the offense will also be involved. The closing circle will involve a welcome back and what has been accomplished. The mentor role is the once which requires the most time and energy as that role serves as the guide. Each circle is for one offender.

The model looks like this:



A case statement is needed for this pilot program and the RJ sub-committee will work on it.

We thanked Mark and Rich for their time.

RJ PROGRAM DISCUSSION

Joe summarized that they want the Youth Commission to sponsor a forum and the pilot program. It was noted that last month the Youth Commission passed a motion made by Peter that the Youth Commission has interest in Restorative Justice, we will sponsor an informational forum with the Human Rights Commission as a co-sponsor, and the RJ sub-committee will get more involved. Once we establish an evening for the forum, there will be much PR work to do for outreach.

OTHER BUSINESS

Bev explained that since we did not have an Autumn Invasion event in the fall of 2009, we have not used up any of our operating budget of \$2500. The end of the fiscal year is June 30, and Bev noted we can not wait until April, May and June to submit bills. It has to be done over the course of the fiscal year. She noted that the revolving account balance is up to \$986.12 following a \$35 deposit on 12/11/09 for continuing water bottle sales in her office.

For budget reasons, Bev asked the Youth Commission to decide upon what kind of seminars to sponsor in the high schools. There was brief discussion about other topics to sponsor but overall the members were very satisfied with the Freedom from Chemical Dependency seminars that we have sponsored in the high schools for the past several years. There has also been good feedback from students that they learned a lot from the seminars, and that many students attended them.

A motion for the Youth Commission to sponsor the FCD seminar programs this year was made by Matt and seconded by Rob and the motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made and approved to accept the minutes of December 9, 2009.

There was brief discussion that this year so far, the students are not involved in putting together a student driven event because we decided the Autumn Invasion event had dwindled and the coffeehouse was too difficult to coordinate. We need to further address how to engage student participation more.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, February 3 at 7:00PM

Respectfully submitted by Beverly Droz